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THE ROMANCE OF A FAVOURITE: COMTESSE DE CASTIGLIONE

ALL who are interested in European politics and especially those who are able to recall how the game was played during the Second Empire—Napoleon III's intervention in Italy and the steps that led up successively to the débâcle of the Franco-Prussian War—will find the career of Comtesse de Castiglione full of fascination. It happens that during that war, which ended so disastrously for France, yet from which she recuperated so wonderfully, I was at school in Germany; and besides the vivid impression created by the general excitement which attended the struggle, I had two personal reasons for following the events of the war with interest. One was that every German victory brought us a half-holiday from school; the other that one of my cousins commanded the Prussian skirmish line at Wissembourg, was severely wounded and received the Iron Cross for bravery.

For these reasons, if none other, I have found William Morton Fullerton's translation of Frédéric Loliée's "Romance of a Favourite," recently published by D. Appleton and Company, a most attractive book. An Italian beauty, a cousin of Cavour's, the Castiglione was sent to France by that statesman in order, that, through her entrancing physical charms and by whatever use she chose to make of them, Napoleon III should be persuaded to aid Italy in her struggle for

unity. Leaving her native land in 1855 on this special mission, Paris may be said to have become her home for the rest of her life; until, "in consequence of the decease of Mme. la Comtesse de Castiglione," her jewelry and other belongings were disposed of at a sale, on the afternoons of June 26-29, 1901, at the Hôtel Drouot.

When the Second Empire went into the European scrap-basket, she was still but thirty; and, in the full radiance of her beauty, she aspired to continue playing a part in politics. She appears to have influenced, though indirectly, the preliminary negotiations for terms of peace after the Franco-Prussian war. Then, finding the republic tiresome, she tried, up to 1877, to persuade the Orleanist princes that they were the trump-cards of the situation and needed but to be played out of her hand to restore the monarchy to France. But the indifference or patriotism of the head of the Orleanist dynasty, the Duc d'Aumale, brought the project to grief, and she became an embittered recluse, to vanish at last, almost forgotten, in the shade and silence of a blighted career.

That she has remained almost forgotten, that the real and important part she played has been overlooked in the history she helped to shape, makes it desirable to reconstruct, at least in outline, the story of her career from M. Loliée's book.

Never, perhaps, as he writes, have the two contrasted, yet sister, literary forms—history and the novel—been so happily blended as in the life of the Castiglione. Surnamed the “Divine” because of her superhuman loveliness, she began her strange and radiant career of conquest as the secret emissary of Italy at the Court of the Tuileries; speedily became the alleged “favourite” of Napoleon III; was, later on, the friend and counsellor of the princes of the House of Orleans; and ended her days alone, far from the madding crowd, aweary of the world and of everything in it.

Few destinies, in fact, were ever richer in contrasted experiences. The gods had granted her an extraordinary physical beauty, and at the same time an intelligence and ambition which she had every right to suppose would entail for her results less illusory than those that in reality befell her. At one moment her life was a romantically wild adventure; at another a series of tragical episodes, with aspects of moral and physical distress that were disconcerting; while over the whole there brooded, like a shadow, a continual mystery.

Almost from childhood in Florence, Virginia Oldoïni (her maiden name) was the fashion, an object of admiration and desire. As she grew up she kept the frank look of the child, never fancying it necessary to lower her lids, as other girls of her age were brought up to do. Before her fifteenth year she had followed, with large limpid eyes, the unfolding of many a tender sentiment leading to marriage among her young friends. It was natural for her to seek happiness in the same direc-

tion, and to heed the accents of love that she heard in low whispers when walking abroad and in the warm atmosphere of social gatherings. In her own case it was the Count de Castiglione who first spoke of love, offering to teach her its language, and he approached her with her mother’s consent.

He was a young man of easy manners and bearing, pleased with his condition and with the names he bore, a youth who had not been obliged to wrestle with life’s difficulties. Though only twenty-six years old, he was already a widower, but he had been distracted from this early sorrow by the pleasures of the court life at Turin and London, and he was now awaiting the ideal passion, a marriage all for love with a woman who really pleased him, and with whom he could begin life afresh. To her he was gentle and obliging; he manifested a constant desire for her affection. But he was wanting in the one superior attraction which the intelligent woman hopes to find in her husband, and without which passionate love is impossible. He lacked the force of character, the energy of will, the enterprising initiative which the young Countess desired in the man of her choice. She yielded because she was inert; she let herself be led to sacrifice in a fine carriage and in gala dress. The marriage ceremony was magnificent, but the absence of the Marquis Oldoïni caused great surprise. He remained in Portugal and refrained from attending the wedding, as if, too well informed as to certain slanders, he was not quite sure that he was giving his own daughter in marriage.

The count settled down with his young wife in a castle near Turin, where he surrounded her with every luxury. The interior offered her the warm luxurious intimacy of Oriental carpets with designs from the garden of dreams; loose curtains of shimmering silk, hangings of Genoese damask, exquisite furniture. A bed worthy of a favourite was ready to receive her young beauty. Long afterwards, years after the separation from her husband and after his death by an accident, there remained to her, of all the luxury of her early marriage, this gold and purple bed, which she preserved to the last in her unused palace at Spezia as a relic of love. Forty years later she still mentioned it in her letters, though under less radiant surroundings. For the lawyers were threatening to sell the precious object (together with many another one).

The Castigliones returned to Turin in time for the round of winter entertainments. The Count's place in the royal household had been kept for him; moreover, Victor Emmanuel had a great affection for the daughter of Oldoïni, treating her like one of his own children. She was welcomed like a queen. The marriage of the Duke of Genoa had just taken place, but the king's sister-in-law was easily put into the shade by the Countess; and as in her native city, so in Piedmont, she won the homage and admiration of everyone.

At the same time her intelligence, her power of assimilation, suggested to her successes less fleeting on a nobler stage. Lofty aspirations were fermenting in the soul of Italy, and young though the Countess was, she claimed

her part in them. Being so close to the King and his minister, the great Cavour, her cousin, she could not be ignorant of the great designs which they both unceasingly pursued. She had a very clear idea that the planning of balls and festivals was the least of their concerns, and that her cousin was making preparations for a concert, the music of which was to produce a very different harmony. Let spontaneous and energetic help come from outside, and the dream of Italian unity, which had never been given up, would at last be realised. What really mattered was to obtain such active and efficient help. An ingenious idea came to Cavour for advancing the chances of his secret negotiations. He resolved to play an unexpected card. A woman's beauty was to serve both as an attraction and a stimulant; the beauty of a clever woman would, at the right moment, know how to plead the great cause.

Through his kinship with the Oldoïni and Castiglione families, Cavour knew the seductive Countess well, and appreciated her intellectual and moral qualities. She combined flexibility with a capacity to rule, and he recognised in her an excellent auxiliary for the success of his diplomatic schemes. He directed her to go to France, to shine at the Court of Napoleon, to use all her cleverness in securing a position there, to persevere in keeping that position, and little by little to determine the Emperor to take those decisive steps on which their hopes were built. This was the part for her to play; the choice of means remained with her. Neither the minister nor the King had thought it well to consult Monsieur de Castig-

lione on so delicate a point. Before deciding to go to France, the Countess herself had not considered it necessary to subject her natural independence to such a conjugal measure. She simply said to herself that she would take with her the man whose name she had so thoughtlessly accepted—if it pleased him to follow her. She felt a great curiosity to see and be seen, and her arrival in Paris was looked forward to as an event of importance. She was promised and assured that triumphs awaited her on that stage of the Tuileries, which was incomparable among the European Courts. So, with a superb boldness and confidence she advanced straight to her goal.

As M. Loliée so graphically describes the scene, it was on the evening of a certain Wednesday, one of the official days, that the Countess de Castiglione for the first time mounted the double flight of stone steps, somewhat steep and high, which led to the reception rooms of the Tuileries. What a vision, that presented to her view a jewelled and elegantly attired company, thronging this long gallery from end to end, and reaching to the imposing Hall of Marshals where were the Imperial couple, and to which, so etiquette ordained, only the most important dignitaries were admitted. The Countess passed under the high crimson velvet drapery that marked the dividing line between the two halls. Was she not Cavour's cousin, and had she not, by virtue of this fact, if not on account of her secret mission, the rank of ambassador? With undisguised admiration, people watched her advance. She too, on her part, looked about her with astonishment. In spite of her

Italian prejudices and exalted belief in the glory of her own beautiful country, how poor and mean, in comparison with this imperial splendour, must have seemed the *festicciola* of the impoverished Court of Piedmont!

On this evening—the 24th of November, 1855—it seemed as if, silhouetted against the superb background just described, only one figure, after those of the Emperor and Empress, commanded attention—Mme. de Castiglione. She arrived a little late. A thrill of curiosity heralded her approach. The sensation caused by her entry was such that the music ceased to play, the dances stopped short. A magnetic current of admiration passed through the hall. The Empress involuntarily took a step towards her. Afterwards, when she had made her courtesy to the sovereigns and had seated herself, the Emperor—first assigning the Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg as the Empress's partner—approached her to offer his hand for the next cotillon. A little later on in the same evening they waltzed together, afterwards strolling about and chatting till the music of the dance ceased. All eyes were fastened on her, on that vivid figure with its soft curves and alluring grace. Her pure profile, her eyes almond-shaped and glowing, her delicately modelled mouth, her superbly abundant and shining chestnut hair, her slender neck poised with distinction on shoulders modelled to perfection, her bared throat whose audacious beauty seemed, according to the expression of an eye-witness, to fling a challenge at all the women present, her regal bust, her arms and hands of an exquisite contour, her incomparably moulded out-

lines—everything about her was made to be loved.

Napoleon III very soon succumbed to the charms of this incomparable Florentine who was the object of such admiring curiosity, that when she passed through the crowd of guests at a State function the people present, regardless of good manners, were wont to jump on their chairs to look at her. People quickly grew to remark the symptoms of his sudden interest in Mme. de Castiglione. One evening at Compiègne a performance by the actors of the *Comédie Française* was being given at the Court Theatre. The Countess, pleading a slight indisposition, had begged to be excused. It was noticed during the evening that the Emperor in his loge seemed much preoccupied, and that he twisted his moustache more than usual—a well-known sign of nervousness with him. In the interval between the first two acts, in the sight of the whole house, he quitted the side of the Empress and disappeared. The next day it was known everywhere that he had gone to inquire in person after the lovely foreigner.

And thus gossip began. A story was whispered abroad of a fan which Mme. de Castiglione had adroitly let drop, and which Napoleon himself had stooped to lift from the ground and restored to its owner. Scarcely had France and the surrounding countries recovered from their surprise at the outcome of his romance with a Spanish beauty—the Empress—yet now he was launched on another with an Italian. How would it end? Would it prove to be a secret and passing caprice, or was it the beginning of an avowed and

open favouritism likely to endure? This was what more than one wily and corrupt Minister of State asked himself with a malicious joy as he tried to lift the veil shrouding the future of this fortune in the ascendant.

Is it to be wondered that the Countess soon felt that the moment had come for discussing political affairs. She was in France in the capacity of an ambassadress in the service of Sardinian diplomacy; the appointed spokeswoman of the Italy-to-be. For this reason, and no other, Cavour had allied her to the multifarious agencies he had set in motion all tending to the one high aim. As an intelligent and beautiful woman, by nature an adept in the devices of coquetry, she must act on the advice given her by the great Piedmontese, “to flirt with the Emperor, if need be to seduce him,” and to lead him to reveal to her in private the essential points which he, as Chief of State, might have to consider in view of bringing about an active entente with the Court of Turin. A letter, brief but significant, which she received from Cavour (M. Loliée had the original before him when he wrote this passage) repeated in explicit terms, “Succeed, my cousin, by any means you please. But succeed!”

It is well known that Italians have an innate ability as well as a passion, for the conduct of public affairs, though they do not always deal with them in a spirit of moderation and method. The Countess, then, was naturally predisposed to her mission, and asked nothing better than to employ in its success all the seduction of her woman’s charm. She resolved to lose no time in pursuance of her plans,

and to effect her object at all costs—yes, even if, for the complete conquest of the Emperor, she must offer a reward which may easily be divined. Truth to tell, she held her own physical perfections in such high esteem, that she was not prepared to be lightly prodigal of them. She kept them as a resource in preserve, a last resort, should other means fail of accomplishing her great designs. Her vanity was flattered and her imagination excited by the importance of her mission and Cavour willingly allowed her to draw all possible glory from it.

Wishing to preserve her independence, to receive her guests, to write, act, and perhaps love, in secret, without however being too far away from the society which was the scene of her constantly recurring triumphs, the Countess had chosen a dwelling situated amongst the old-world gardens of Passy. It was a little house in the style of the *régence*, a veritable bower, vine-clad without, and within hung in silk tapestries and filled with dainty trifles. Though retired, it was not at the ends of the earth. A journey from the Tuilleries to the Rue de la Pompe took less than an hour. Napoleon, unaccustomed as he was to grant special favours to charming women without hope of return, would surely have considered himself much to blame had he never extended his evening drive (guarded by his private detectives and with his confidential coachman) so far as this habitation, hermitage in appearance, indeed, but ruled by no hermit-like regulations.

Parisian society easily pictured the kind of interview for which "important conversations on the subject of

Italy and Austria" were the ostensible pretext. He and she were alone, tête-à-tête, listening to, and seeing, one another. She was only eighteen. He was ardent and impressionable. It was no longer a question of an Emperor condescending from his high estate to show courtly and momentary deference to a guest. All differences of rank were effaced. In that quiet room there were only two human beings of different sex, meeting on equal ground, and drawn to each other by an irresistible attraction. It was generally believed in Paris that the Countess was the Emperor's established "favourite." Some good people, absolutely sure of the facts about which they knew nothing, stated, indeed, that this was Mme. de Castiglione's second experience in the way of royal lovers, asserting that Victor Emmanuel had at one time bestowed upon her the kind of affection of which he was known to be lavish. However that may have been, it is certain that, favoured by the circumstances which brought them together, Mme. de Castiglione spoke often with the Emperor of Victor Emmanuel, Cavour and the hoped-for Union of Italy, and the first and unquestionable result of her secret influence was that, after a little hesitation, Napoleon decided to include Cavour in the Congress of Paris.

Yet so far it was only the case of a fire-ship being launched upon the waves of international rivalries. A space of time must of necessity elapse between the declaration of the principle and that recourse to arms which would uphold it. Mme. de Castiglione deemed it prudent to spend this period of waiting away from Paris. Leaving

"her Napoleon," as in one of her letters she proudly calls him, she went to London, and spent many pleasant days there. She received a cordial welcome, and was hospitably entertained in several of the homes of the best English society, and more especially at Holland House. Lord and Lady Holland had known her as a child in her native Florence and felt a warm affection for her, as a little detail of her visit proves. For on her arrival at Holland House she was shown into a large and beautifully furnished bedroom. On her toilet-table—the first thing at which a woman just arrived from a journey naturally looks—she noticed a mirror of unusually artistic workmanship. It was a bevelled hand-glass, surmounted by her crest, and framed by two angels with widely out-spread wings worked in gold. Lying beside the exquisite thing, some lines, in Lord Holland's handwriting, revealed for whom it was intended:

To the Countess Castiglione.

A lovely gift I fain would send to thee,
What I deem loveliest in this mirror see!

—Holland.

The Castiglione well understood that to come too frequently before the eyes of the public tends to depreciate one's value. It behooves the stars of the social stage to limit their appearances and not tire their audiences, so as to keep fresh the spectators' admiration. Mme. de Castiglione loved, without announcing either her departure or her return, to appear and then suddenly disappear. And by this means she kept social attention constantly fixed on her, or awoke it to fresh activity if it showed signs of languishing. The reasons of her fre-

quent absences from Paris, though she chose to surround them with mystery, were generally perfectly simple. Save for a few political missions, such as those in 1858 and 1859, where she had to treat by word of mouth with Victor Emmanuel or Cavour, her journeys such as looking after her property in Italy, were undertaken to meet the necessities of her daily life, and had no enigma whatever attaching to them. But it pleased her vanity to throw a veil of secrecy and mystery over all she did and to play the rôle of sphinx.

Between 1856 and 1870 the dates of her appearances and disappearances can be fairly well determined. In 1857 she shone for a brief moment in the Parisian firmament and then was seen no more; in 1858 she seemed to be dematerialised; in 1859 a fleeting vision of her is again granted to the watchers; in 1860 and 1861, having no longer a rôle to play, or rather because constrained to inaction, she gives France no sign of her existence; in 1862 she returns once more; from 1864 on, new flights into the neighboring country; and finally, from after 1868, she makes a fairly protracted sojourn in France, remaining there till the fall of the Empire.

People, however, gathered an exaggerated idea of her importance from the air of mystery with which she ever surrounded herself. She was supposed to have inner information concerning European statecraft. Different Governments had conferred certain privileges on her. The diplomatic world was supposed to be her province. The Emperor, it was said, asked her advice in private. Without making any definite statement she allowed it to be

understood that she was in active correspondence with the principal personages of foreign courts. And then there was the further attraction of the perfection of her physical charms.

Of course, the more she drew her cloak of reserve about her, the more she increased the curiosity of the Court newsmongers, who were deeply disappointed to find themselves in ignorance of her secret service work, her motives of action, and her private likes or dislikes. Thus it was taken to be as good as certain that she was the "friend" of Napoleon III, and knowing the Emperor's temperament, no one challenged the fact. She, however, never confessed to it, and often contradicted it. Both in writing and speaking she sought to prove that their relations had been solely intellectual; "but," writes M. Loliée, "her protestations would be greatly shaken, if I were to compare certain indiscreet conjectures, and especially if I were to place under the magnifying-glass a certain phrase contained in her last will and testament, by which she gave orders to be robed for burial 'in the nightdress of Compiègne, of cambric and lace, 1857.'"

On more than one occasion the audacious Countess even wounded the susceptibilities of the Empress Eugénie both as sovereign and as wife, or even as a mere woman, with a woman's natural pride in dress. There was one special incident of a rivalry in coiffures which almost brought about Mme. de Castiglione's exclusion from Court functions. Under the second Empire the fashionable evening head-dress required an addition to one's own hair of a luxuriant supplement of false

tresses, upon which the coiffeurs of the time exhausted all their powers of imagination and art. Though not as complicated as were those of the famous Leonard of eighteenth century renown, who built veritable architectural monuments on the heads of his fair clients, these chignons had their own originalities, and success or failure in inventing and in wearing them was a grave matter for jealous emulation.

A distant descendant of the famous Champagne, a certain Leroy, worked marvels in the service of the Empress. He was ingenious, zealous, and inventive. One morning when he was engaged in doing the Empress's hair, she urged him to surpass himself on the occasion of the next Court ball. He promised her majesty a coiffure altogether worthy of her. He immediately understood the task, and after much study and effort created the masterpiece which was to be the crowning-point of his career. He had the happy certainty that it was indeed a chef-d'œuvre, majestic, delicate, and original—in a word, the best thing of its kind ever done.

Thereupon, quite unexpectedly, the Countess de Castiglione informed him that she had decided to entrust him with the making of a chignon coiffure for her. Up to this time she had trusted to her own inspiration in these matters. She it was who introduced the fashion of arranging feathers in the form of a coronet on the hair, a style which made her appear taller than she was, and at the same time harmonised with her stately beauty. But now, under the influence of some fantastic whim, she declared that she must

have exactly the same model as the Empress for her next head-dress, and insisted that Leroy should begin making it for her without delay. At first the hair-dresser refused, pointing out respectfully but firmly that her Majesty would be exceedingly annoyed if she saw on the head of some one else a "creation" which had been intended for her alone, and that he would never dare to give her such just cause for displeasure. But the Countess clung to her caprice. She pleaded with Leroy not to refuse her this satisfaction, appealing to his sentimentality, his vanity, and finally succeeded in obtaining what she desired by promising him on her woman's word of honour that she would only use the coiffure after the evening of the ball, on a quite different occasion.

He finally yielded, believing these promises sincere, and the next day sent her the wished-for coiffure—shining, light, magnificent, like the other. He might have known what would happen. Mme. de Castiglione made all haste to wear it on the evening of the great ball, and to the extreme surprise of those present two coiffures alike in every respect faced each other. It was only the next day that the Empress gave vent to her anger when she called the unfortunate hair-dresser before her, scolded him roundly, and informed him that henceforth she would dispense with his services. As a matter of fact she replaced him by the cleverest of his pupils, the cautious Alexandre. Poor Leroy, who was a perfect courtier in his own way, fell ill through the shock, contracting a lingering illness which brought him to death's door.

This was not the only time that Mme. de Castiglione "ruffled" the Empress—if the play upon words may be permitted—in the matter of toilet. Eugénie, as is well known, openly favoured the introduction of wide and outstanding hoop-skirts, and when the Emperor teased her about it she answered him archly that she could not imagine how she had dared to live so many years without a cage. But the Countess, of too independent a nature meekly to copy the prevailing fashions, was one of the first to rebel against the cumbersome and ungainly steel crinoline, favoured though it was at Court and in the world outside. She was thirty or forty years in advance of her time in liking the straight flowing narrow robe which follows the lines of the body and seems a woman's natural lines, appearing to live with the wearer and to be part of her.

The Countess de Castiglione in full dress, especially in costume, marked a date in the history of Parisian society. In the art of dressing she had an imagination fertile in surprises. Whether she chose an artful simplicity to astonish those who were looking for the opposite effect, whether she aimed at producing a sensation, there was invariably an original note, graded off to a slight eccentricity, which at once marked her out. At one moment her coquetry led her to put under contribution, the gardens of nature rather than the jeweller's caskets. She would even content herself with a single wreath of eglantine, carelessly tangled in her hair; and, indeed, she had a preference for adorning herself with flowers, and the utmost concession she would make to worldly vanity was to

allow some brilliants to be sown, as it were, among the blossoms. Again, she would employ the dark, as well as the glittering, precious stones to dazzle the beholders with flame and fire. In general, she favoured a bold cut, a suggestive style of gowns.

Most celebrated of them all, the one that, so to speak, gave the hall-mark to the glory of this incomparable Florentine beauty, was the legendary costume of Salammbô—the one she never wore. During the winter of 1864, a fortnight before the Court Ball, a rumour got abroad that the “Italian” would be present audaciously draped only in a wimple of violet gauze, such as the Carthaginian virgin used to envelop her marvelous body when she went to demand the sacred veil of the Temple of Tanit from the barbarian chief. This piece of news was so often repeated that everybody ended by believing it. Salammbô’s diaphanous tunic proved to have been only a dream—or a scandal; for alas! truth to tell, the Countess appeared in a high-necked gown of black velvet, embroidered in gold and covered by an overskirt of cloth-of-silver; all very rich, but extremely correct.

“How much more generously, on another occasion,” says M. Lolié, “she had treated certain artists! Sincerely convinced that beauty is a very rare and very evanescent privilege of nature; that its duty is to educate the eye; that the primary element of inspiration is the harmony of those parts of which beauty is composed, she had condescended to show herself, a living statue, without any veil between her beauty and the artists’ admiration. Did she consent once, twice? There is no

exact record, but there are people to confirm the fact, at least. They had a brief vision of this beautiful marble, unclothed. At any rate, one of them, the Baron de Malaret, one day forgot himself in his indiscreet enthusiasm, summing up Mme. de Castiglione’s perfections: her dazzling blue eyes, the graces of her face, flawless shape of her arms, of her waist. ‘And what wee feet!’ he went on, becoming more and more enthusiastic as he proceeded in the evocation of his souvenirs. ‘What exquisite limbs! What . . .’ ‘How? What?’ . . . objected the Baroness Malaret—one of the Empress’s ladies-in-waiting—who was astonished and annoyed to find her husband so accurately informed as to the Countess’s perfections.”

For living pictures, indeed, Mme. de Castiglione sometimes showed an interest, though she seldom took part in tableaux vivants without displaying the capriciousness of her temperament. This form of diversion gave her an opportunity to study herself and the effect she made on others; since it enabled her to see for herself how her attractions could be made to vary by the play of attitude and combinations of attire. In the art of transformation she felt singularly sure of herself. A piece of stuff carelessly draped, the clever placing of a trinket, the winding about her but of a light scarf—this was all that was needed. With these devices she could be ready for a portrait—or make herself resemble an odalisque in a dream, in languid poses expressive of the abandonment of her whole being. Or even, evoking the Madonnas of the Roman school, she could give herself the semblance of a saintly fig-

ure, little as such an impersonation seemed to be in harmony with her real nature and her desires.

These, however, were but passing fancies. Moreover, the tableaux vivants had the ephemeral life of all fashions. She was one of the first to tire of them. She lost her taste for society. The company of the men and women who had been represented to her as the flower of the Parisian world grew monotonous. She became melancholy, and the prey of regret. She persuaded herself that, notwithstanding her success in the Italian matter, she had come to France too late—that in the ascendancy of her physical charms, she, the Italian, could as easily have captured the crown of an empress as the Spaniard Eugénie; while, politically, she would have used it to better advantage. A boundless disillusionment crept over her before her youth had begun to wane, and it was in this melancholy mood that the thunderbolt of 1870—the Franco-Prussian War and the fall of the Empire—descended upon her.

Up to this point her career had been a brilliant one, and it is in its narration of her life up to this point that M. Loliée's book is most fascinating. Disillusionment, failure—these are not interesting experiences to write or read about; and, after 1870, it would have been well if the author had condensed the story. Her first effort, after the overthrow of the Empire, though played on a less brilliant stage, at least was success, though she may have exaggerated the assistance which she had given to French diplomacy. Certainly she failed to change the course of events or to alter the terms of treaties; but by her semi-official intervention, which was appreciated in Florence and Berlin, she was able to

remove several causes of friction and to facilitate certain very difficult negotiations. A part of the preliminary negotiations, which led Jules Favre and Thiers to debate with the conqueror the conditions of peace, took place through her and the French legation at Florence.

After that came the third phase of her mysterious activity, a phase of which the public had no inkling, when, from 1871 to 1877, she was urging the Duc d'Aumale to usurp a dictatorship—it being her conviction that he had only to stretch out his hand for it—and when she undertook, with violent energy, to touch a thousand springs in order to stimulate the apathy of the Orleanist Princes and the lofty indifference of the pretenders. In vain did she and others urge them to seize the opportunities, which were presented to them at least three times, for the restoration of the monarchy in France. She wasted her efforts to no purpose; no one listened to her song.

Thereupon, that grievous condition of soul took possession of her, in which all human beings, whatever their outward trappings or dignities, appear shrunken, both morally and physically. Her political failures greatly contributed to tighten the circle of melancholy that hemmed her in, and to which she had gradually been driven by her premature disgust of a world which she had approached too young. Add to this the loss of her son George, a charming creature and the only being whom she had ever really loved; and finally, a consideration of no less importance, the inevitable distress of a supremely beautiful woman, witnessing the slow decay of her charms.

In an eminent degree she had been a flower of the night, and a late-blooming flower at that. Whether

there was dancing or not, she generally arrived late, distributed her time according to the company and consulted only her own pleasure as to the fitting hour for returning to her house in Passy. Thus, in her gala days. Later, when she withdrew more and more within herself, she gave rein, in her various lodgings, to her truly Italian imagination, in making the simplest things appear mysterious. She rejoiced in romantic and complicated inventions in order to multiply the difficulties of access to herself. Thus, at No. 10 Rue de Castiglione, in a spare apartment she had once had, "I was shown the mechanism of what I can only call a turnstyle door, which, swinging on its pivot, hid from sight whoever might be coming in or going out." In the Place Vendome a private entrance had been arranged for her, on the right side of the building, of a kind to ensure the most artful protection! Before reaching the goal, one had to halt thrice. From the street the visitor had to announce himself by the sign agreed upon (preferably a whistle), which Mme. de Castiglione quickly caught through her closed shutters. The street-door gaped open, but you had scarcely advanced two paces when you stumbled against a second door, forbidding and iron-plated, that guarded the approach to the staircase. After one had pronounced the indispensable password, the door turned on its hinges. After that the visitor had still to mount the few steps leading to the landing of the entresol, which had no bell. The interior mechanism of the lock worked noiselessly, and at last one crossed the threshold of this so severely barricaded flat, while the shrill yelps of two little dogs welcomed the visitor as a well-known guest.

Then, too, there were times when she was badly in need of money. Her Italian properties were involved in law suits. To relieve a situation, already seriously compromised, she desired to wipe out, at one stroke, her personal debts and those of her reckless parents. But in order to accomplish this, she lacked a round sum amounting to several hundreds of thousands of francs. Once more, as she often had in her heyday, she went to the bank in the Rue Laffitte, offering her great friend, Alphonse de Rothschild, the chance of buying her entire possessions, she to keep only the usufruct of them for life. The king of finance listened in an absent-minded way to her proposals, without entering into them. She returned a second time with a revised version of her scheme that appeared to her exceedingly alluring. But still this master calculator failed to be seduced by her dazzling propositions. He adopted a paternal air, admitted that the affair was a good one, very good, but added that he did not care to burden himself with it. As she started to leave, depressed and crestfallen, he sought to soothe her trouble by a visible and immediate compensation, and he said to her: "Here, my dear Countess, accept these bits of paper (ten thousand francs); go and rest and take care of yourself; and don't let us talk any more of this." Even in the face of these blue "bits of paper," however, Mme. de Castiglione's face still remained glum, and the banker, in jest, feigned to restore the tempting bank notes to their place. He then instantly handed them to her again; but alas! she incautiously persevered in her proudly disdainful attitude, declaring that she "wouldn't take them for anything in the world." "Tear them up," she

cried, with a fine dramatic gesture. "No indeed, no indeed," the Baron answered, and thereupon he carefully slipped the money into a drawer, while in his visitor's ears resounded the cruel snapping of a lock of which she had abandoned the "open sesame."

Yet, in spite of law-suits and temporary financial embarrassments, she had valuable personal belongings. Mme. de Castiglione's jewels! Their inventory was prodigious, and all Paris must have thrilled with curiosity on the great day of their dispersal. They must have been of great value, since, at divers times, she had been able to borrow from one hundred to two hundred thousand francs on merely a part of the collection. The title of the general catalogue offered to amateurs was as follows: "Catalogue of very fine jewels: Remarkable necklace of five rows of pearls, unset pearls, parures, bracelets, brooches, ear-rings, rings, pins set with brilliants and coloured stones, fancy jewelry, silverware, fans, bric-à-brac, laces, books, souvenirs of the Second Empire, pictures, portraits, furniture, objects of art. In consequence of the decease of Mme. la Comtesse de Castiglione, the sale will take place at the Hôtel Drouot, Hall No. 1, on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th of June, 1901, at two o'clock." At this sale, the pearl necklace, composed of two hundred and seventy-nine pearls, weighing all together 3838 grains, brought nearly half a million francs (\$100,000).

And so she was dead; and, save for the sale of her effects; precious little notice was taken of the demise of this once beautiful and brilliant woman. In her melancholy latter days, she had wished that her death should go unchronicled. The funeral ceremony was

to be kept anonymous; there were to be no wreaths of flowers, no oration, almost no witnesses. The last desires of her clouded brain were carried out only too precisely, for her few faithful friends were widely scattered. Cléry, one of her few confidants, was in Venice, the Princes absent, the others in ignorance of her condition or intentionally unmindful. She had died almost suddenly, attended solely by a few old servants, notably the aged Luisa Corse, her governess. None of them had been informed of her last wishes, and none of them knew what to do when she had breathed her last. It fell to the lot of one of her lawyers, a quite recent friend, Maitre Guillaume Desouches, to undertake the melancholy task usually imposed upon the family of the deceased.

The Duke of Vallombroso, who in her glorious youth, had known her well and greatly admired her, and whom she called cousin by courtesy (though he was only very distantly related, or not at all), was almost the only one present in the vault under the Madeleine. And he was almost the only one to drop the holy water on the coffin of her who had held so great a place in the world of the rich and powerful. "If I had not been there to escort her woeful remains," he wrote to someone who had greatly loved her, "there would have been no one present but hirelings!"

And so this woman, starving for the love of her kind, dying of an abandonment, a loneliness, which, nevertheless, she herself had created, ended by leading a most singular existence, a life strangely disorganised, without the solace of husband, of child, or of lover.

Not a relative wrote to her executor to inquire where she was buried.